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INFORMATION REPORT

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1. [redacted] a six months' course for graduates of civilian veterinary schools in the USSR who were to enter the Soviet Army. The training course, which was given under the aegis of the Military Veterinary Academy at Moscow, was conducted in Kiev in a large brick building containing the living quarters and dining room as well as the classrooms, library, and laboratories. I recall this building as being as clean as any hospital I have ever seen. The six months I spent there is one of the most vivid memories I have of the USSR. It seemed to me at the time, and it seems so now in retrospect, that if the USSR had deliberately set itself the task of humiliating a group of highly trained and valuable professional personnel and arousing in them a single-minded desire to escape the country, it could hardly have devised a more effective means to that end than this course.

The Student Body

2. There were 62 students in the course, all men, and all recent graduates of a civilian veterinary college. We were all in uniform with the status of recruits and the pay was 12 roubles a month. The oldest was 30, the youngest 25, and the average age about 27. There were three Armenians, 12 to 15

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bred veterinarians were, and no doubt still are, throughout the USSR. The fathers of three members of the class (or five percent) were veterinarians, also a fairly typical ratio for the profession in the USSR. Three of the students, all Russians, were Communist Party members. We knew the identity of the Party members because they answered affirmatively to the question on Party membership which was asked of each student, along with other personal data questions, in full assembly. I never learned whether there were any NKVD members among the students. There was a great deal of grumbling, for the specific reasons I shall outline below, but rarely in the presence of one of the Party members. The fear of the NKVD was pervasive, as always in the USSR, but did not inhibit the expression of bitter complaints among small groups of mutually trusting students, usually of common ethnic origin.

Curriculum and Faculty

3. There were eight hours a day, six days a week, of classroom instruction. The following courses were given:

(a) Basic military cartography: We learned to read and to prepare terrain maps.

(b) Veterinary field surgery: This course was quite different from the comparable civilian course. The emphasis was on speed, improvisation, and the problems of transporting sick animals under emergency field conditions.

(c) Politics: We had at least three hours a day of this throughout the entire six months. Lectures were given in economics, current world affairs, history of Communism etc.

(d) Hygiene: Intensive instruction in food and water inspection under combat conditions. There was considerable emphasis on the inspection for poisons of abandoned or captured enemy provisions.

(e) Sports: One hour a day of routine calisthenics and games.

(f) Pistol marksmanship: Pistols were the only weapon in which we received any instruction.

The school had a very good general library in which we were required to spend at least one hour of every workday evening.

The instructors were first-rate and all were high-ranking (colonels and generals) officers in the Soviet Veterinary Corps. There was one instructor for each of the several courses.

4. Miserable and inadequate food and cruel discipline were the conditions mainly responsible for student discontent. By the time the course ended, nearly every student - whether or not he admitted it - had come to loathe the government which had subjected him to such an existence. There was hardly a man in the class who would not have forsaken the USSR and his profession and future if there had been any opportunity to do so.

Food

5. For young men in good health and undergoing a demanding physical and mental

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Discipline

6. Passes to leave the school premises were issued only once a week and were never good for more than five hours. A student could obtain a five-hour pass only if he had some project in mind such as a play or concert, requiring that much time. The school authorities arbitrarily would limit a pass to one or two hours if a man said he merely wanted to go for a walk. No student was issued a pass to go out alone; he had to go with at least one other man. The penalty for being three minutes late returning from a pass was a day in jail; for being five minutes late, three days in jail; for being 15 minutes late, three months at hard labor in a work battalion; for being one half hour late, six months in a work battalion; for being away all night, five to 10 years at hard labor and, if in wartime, immediate execution. Any time spent in jail or in work battalions did not count against military service. No excuses for tardiness were acceptable. The effect of all this was to terrorize most of the students into staying well within sight of the school. Most of the men spent most of their passes walking carefully around the block, fearing even to get disoriented within the immediate area of the school. Only one student, an Armenian, ran afoul of these penalties during the course. He spent three days in jail and was given no food, only water, during his imprisonment. His companion deserted him before the last drink and made it back in time.
7. Social discrimination against the students, on the basis of their lowly military status, exacerbated the bitterness caused by the bad food and the cruel pass system. As graduate veterinarians and men of higher than average intelligence and achievement, we were surprised and hurt to find ourselves at the very bottom - even though temporarily - of a rigid and arrogant military hierarchy. Lacking previous military experience, we were shocked by the military stratification which was so much more severe than that which prevails in Soviet civilian life. The good bars and restaurants and places of entertainment in the precincts of the school were for officers only. Having just completed five difficult years of veterinary college and being students in another school which was little better than a prison, we resented this obstacle to our being able to make the most of what little freedom we were allowed. There was a lot of grumbling among the students about "undemocracy."
8. The snobbishness of the Russians toward the rest of us was yet another factor in the low morale of the non-Russian students. Many of us had not previously found ourselves in a group dominated by a Russian majority. The Russian attitude of superiority was not flagrant, to be sure, but it was clear that they regarded the rest of us as lesser breeds. The Russians rarely asked students of other nationalities to be pass companions and rarely accepted such invitations. Absolutely no favoritism was shown the Russians by the school authorities, however.

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